

## Benchmarking 101

Benchmarking is “a process of measuring and comparing to identify ways to improve process and achieve higher performance”

### What is a Benchmark?

- A benchmark is the “anticipated or desired performance results anchored either in professional standards or in the experience of respected municipalities.”
- A “benchmark is the standard, or performance level, established or aspired to by the benchmarking agency.”
- Benchmarks are not static and are time sensitive.

### Why are Benchmarks Critical?

In general, benchmarks assist an agency in determining the degree to which the organization is achieving its goals. Fischer (1994) highlights three reasons for public systems to pursue benchmarks:

- ***To determine the criteria that underlies performance.*** In the absence of this foundation comparisons will lack validity. How would an agency decide what to compare?
- ***Identify problem areas within respective services.*** Benchmarks help inform the determination of where to deploy critical resources to achieve the maximum return. Would an agency want to place limited resources in a site that is performing slightly below a benchmark or would it be more beneficial to focus resources on sites far below the benchmark?
- ***Improve delivery of services by importing best practices.*** Using data for improvement is a key to benchmarking. Sites meeting or exceeding benchmarks may sustain promising practices that can be replicated.

### How are Benchmarks Determined?

Examining competitor performances (e.g., general education, other states) as well as your own organization's performance (e.g., past and current performance) contribute to the establishment of benchmarks. While education benchmarks are common by grade-level and subject matter, state-level benchmarks, are virtually nonexistent. Consequently, the methodology has yet to be established. As with the KPIs the department will develop the actual benchmarks.

### Considerations Guiding Benchmarking

- Which indicators should we benchmark first? Consider that several existing indicators are consistent with broader initiatives (e.g., federal legislation).
- With what frequency are benchmarks assessed and revised? Will this be consistent across all benchmarks?
- Comparisons are critical. What are some potential (doable) comparisons for the initial benchmarks?

## References

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